(iv) Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 has been enacted to regulate the diversion of forest lands.

(v) A net work of protected areas has been established.

(vi) Recently, Ministry has prepared a National Forests Action Plan to enhance the contribution of forestry and tree resources for ecological stability and people centered development through improvement in investment for conservation and development of forest resources.

Ecological degradation in coastal areas of Orissa

646. SHRI MAN MOHAN SAMAL: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is a fact that illegal prawn culture on the coastal areas of Orissa has adversely affected the ecological balance of the area; and

(b) Whether Government have made any study on the aforesaid ecological degradation in those areas?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) In compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court, National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur, conducted an investigation regarding the adverse impacts of aquaculture on the coastal areas of various States, including Orissa.

Encroachment of forest areas in Orissa

647. SHRI MAN MOHAN SAMAL: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is a fact that large areas of protected land meant for village forest have been illegally encroached by unscrupulous people in the coastal districts of Balasore, Bhadror, Vendrapara, Puri and Jagatsingpur in Orissa;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what action Government propose to take against the encroachers and restore the land to its original status?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) and (b) There is no report that a large quantity of protected land meant for village forest have been illegally encroached by the unscrupulous people in the coastal districts of Balasore, Bhadror, Vendrapara, Puri and Jagatsingpur of Orissa as protection of forests from encroachment etc. is primarily the responsibility of the State Government.

(c) To prevent and remove the encroachment on forest land, action is taken by the State Government under the provisions of various State Forest Acts and Rules. Central Government issues guidlines from time to time to the States for strengthening the protection machinery. The State Governments have also been advised to involve local communities in the protection and development of forests under the Joint Forest Management Programme.

Timber smuggling

648. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether Goverment's attention has been drawn to the news item appearing in the Pioneer dated 24th May, 2000 under the heading "NE bigwigs in timber smuggling" racket;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what action Government have taken against the persons involved in smuggling of timber?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) On receipt of information, about 200 wagons containing timber transported from North Eastern States have been detained for physical verification. During physical verification, it has been found